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A TYPOLOGICAL SURVEY OF DEFINITIONS: THE NAME 'PĀÑCARĀTRA'

Utilizing Texts of the Pāñcarātra Saṃhitās

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Two highly reputed scholars, Professors J. A. B. van Buitenen and V. Raghavan, have both within the past five years turned their attention to the name "Pañcarātra." The former, writing in the winter 1962 issue of *History of Religions* (Chicago, Vol. 1, No. 2, "The Name Pañcarātra," pp. 291-299), deliberately limited himself to the pre-saṃhitā texts and to non-sectarian works. From the evidence that he collected, Professor van Buitenen suggested that the origin of the term is to be sought among those wandering ascetics of ancient India who followed night-rules, that this group gradually won a certain group identification and that, as their devotional religion "went philosophical," the term Pañcarātra also came to be applied to a system of thought, to the literature it produced and to the adherents it won. He noted in his article (p. 291) that not much importance need be attached to the fact that the Mahāsanatkumāra-saṃhitā is divided into five parts called "Nights." The latter scholar, Professor V. Raghavan, in a paper read in New Delhi at the XXVIth International Congress of Orientalists and recently published in *The Journal of American Oriental Society* (Baltimore, Vol. 85, No. 1, January-March 1965, "The Name Pāñcarātra: with an analysis of the Sanatkumāra-saṃhitā in manuscript," pp. 73-79), chose to review some traditions found in nine canonical saṃhitā-texts of the school. After analyzing these and other pertinent data, he concluded (p. 76) that the name should be based on the blocks of teaching that were once delivered in nightly discourses to particular sages, and that the sections preserved in the [Mahā-] Sanatkumāra-saṃhitā as "rātras" and named after five "sages"— Śiva, Brahmā, Indra, Ṛṣis, and Brahmaṇaspati— attest to a division and tradition in the school's development that came to be the most highly regarded and helped to determine the epithet for the school itself.

The purpose of the present article is not to dispute either scholar's methods or conclusions. Neither is it concerned to venture into the history of the Pāñcarātra school nor the chronology of its canonical literature. Rather, the purpose here is to present a typological survey of the definitions of the name "Pāñcarātra" found in the Pāñcarātra-saṃhitās[1] and, with little more than identifying comments, to place the transliterated texts of these definitions at the disposal of other scholars who may wish to use them as raw data for further considerations of the problematical term.

1. The extent of the Pāñcarātrāgama corpus of canonical literature is traditionally said to be "108" saṃhitās. F.O. Schrader in his *Introduction to the Pañcarātra and the Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā* (Adyar, Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1916, pp. 6-11) names over two hundred titles found in various lists in extent saṃhitās; and Pandit V. Krishnamacharya in his Sanskrit Introduction to the text of the *Lakṣmī Tantra*, which he edited (Adyar, Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1959, pp. 10-11), lists even more titles from additional lists. Of the many titles in circulation, there are perhaps two dozen texts in print, another dozen surviving as reasonably complete unpublished manuscripts, and a number of fragments of incomplete manuscripts and passages extant in various manuscripts libraries. The present author has surveyed most of the extant works of the Pañcarātrāgama available, and the article in hand uses materials found in twenty-two saṃhitās and four other relevant works. The saṃhitā titles quoted from are: *Ahirbudhnya, Aniruddha, Hayaśirṣa, Īśvara, Jñānāmṛtasāra, Kapiñjala, Mārkaṇḍeya, Nāradīya, Padma, Parama, Paramapuruṣa, Pārameśvara, Pauṣkara, Puruṣottama, Śāṇḍilya, Śeṣa, Śrīprāśna, Vāmana, Viṣvagendra, Viṣṇu* (-Saṃhitā), *Viṣṇu* (-Tantra) and *Viśvāmitra*. Citation is also made to a commentary of the *Bharadvājasaṃhitā* (1), to the *Śrīpañcarātrarakṣā* by Vedānta Deśika, to a secondary work of the Pañcarātra school called *Utsavasāṃgraha*, and to a Śākta work called *Saktisaṃgama Tantra*. Specific information about each work will be given in appropriate subsequent end-notes.

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The materials of this survey will be presented within the following outline:

I. Variant Definitions based on the element °-*rātra*
   - A. Construed as "Night".
   - B. Construed as "Night," but extended to refer to certain things being shrouded in darkness; hence, an "Obscuration," an "Obliteration".
   - C. Construed as from *rātrīyate* | *rātryāyate*, indicating something being put "in the dark"; or, "Ignorance".
   - D. Understood in positive terms; °-*rātra* as "Knowledge," "Enlightenment"; hence, construed as a "Gift".
   - E. Miscellaneous, positive interpretations.

II. Variant Definitions based on the element *pañca*-°
   - A. The "fifth Veda".
   - B. "Five" of something— 5 senses, 5 objects of the senses, 5 gross elements, 5 "other" systems, etc.
   - C. Various combinations of "five."
   - D. Construed as "five" practices to be observed by devout Pāñcarātrins, namely, the Pañcasaṃskāras, or the Pañcakālas.

III. Other miscellaneous explanations

IV. Summary

I. *Variant Definitions Based on the Element °-rātra*

The primary meaning of *rātra* is "night," although it may also on occasion mean the twenty-four hour period of night-and-day, hence, "day" in the twenty-four hour sense. As we shall see, the element °-*rātra* in some instances in the saṃhitā literature is extended to refer to certain things being shrouded in darkness, hence an obscuration, an obliteration; and also to that which can be compared to (as we would say colloquially) "being in the dark," or ignorance. Yet another group of definition apparantly take °-*rātra* in a

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more positive sense, where the thrust seems to indicate knowledge, enlightenment; hence, even a gift. Far from ignoring the element °-*rātra*, as Professor van Buitenen, basing himself upon Schrader, believes to be the case in the saṃhitā definitions,[2] a good many of the more interesting examples turn upon that very part of the word.

I-A. The most elemental canonical definitions of *pañcarātra*, to be sure, take the obvious—and commonly accepted—course: these definitions have something to do with five [*pañca*] nights [*rātra*]. Sometimes, in this connection, it is said that a particular sage is taught something in the course of five "nights," or days-and-nights "days" as in the *Puruṣottama-saṃhitā* (I:6b-7a)[3]:

sārdhakoṭipramāṇena brahmaṇā keśavāt śrutam || [6b]
rātribhiḥ pañcabhis sarvaṃ pāñcarātrāgamaṃ smṛtam | [7a]

Likewise, in the *Paramapuruṣasaṃhitā* (I:24):[4]

śrīman nārāyaṇo śauriḥ hariḥ paramapūruṣaḥ| [24a]
pañca rātriṣu tat sarvam brahmaṇe avadat svayam || [24b]

Or, again, in the *Mārkaṇḍeyasaṃhitā* (I:19):[5]

sārdhakoṭipramāṇena kathitam tasya viṣṇunā | [19a]
rātribhiḥ pañcabhiḥ sarvam pañcarātramataḥ smṛtam|| [19b]

A variant of this "five nights" teaching to one sage is to multiply the number of recipients. In the *Parcmasaṃhitā* (XXXI: 18-19 *passim*)[6] Sanatkumāra, Sanaka, Sanandana and Sanātana learn from Brahmā in the course of five days of instruction:

tebhyo jñānam dadau sarvam pañcarātreṇa sarvaśaḥ || [19b]

Or, another work, the *Viṣṇu Tantra*, quoted in the Sanskrit Introduction to the published edition of the *Paramasaṃhitā*,[7] has it that on the first night, one lakh of ślokas were taught to Brahmā, on the second night Śiva received instruction, on the third night Ādiśeṣa [v.l., Indra], on the fourth night "sage," and on the fifth night Bṛhaspati was taught. As Professor V. Raghavan has pointed out in his article already cited, the [*Mahā-*] *Sanat-*

2. See J.A.B. van Buitenen, "The Name Pañcarātra," *History of Religions*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Winter 1962), pp. 291-299, especially p. 291. Compare F.O. Schrader, *op. cit.*, p. 24. See also V. Raghavan, "The Name Pāñcarātra: With an Analysis of the Sanatkumārasaṃhitā in Manuscript," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 85, No. 1 (January March 1965), pp. 73-79.

3. *Puruṣottamasaṃhitā*, edited by P. Sitaramacarya, Bhadrachalam, Granthamalikasakha (The Publication of Literary Pride in India, No. 2), 1932 (Telugu script).

4. *Paramapuruṣasaṃhitā*, edited by P. Sitaramacarya, Bhadrachalam, Granthamalikasakha (The Publication of Literary Pride in India, No. 4), *kri. s.* 1798 (*sic*) (Telugu script).

5. *Mārkaṇḍeyasaṃhitā*, Adyar ms. 10. J. 24 (Devanagari script on paper) = Madras Government Oriental Manuscripts Library ms. R. 2936 (Telugu script on paper).

6. *Paramasaṃhitā*, edited by S. Krishnaswamy Aiyangar, Baroda, Gaekwad's Oriental Series, Vol. 86, 1940 (Devanagari script).

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 29 - 40.

kumāra-saṃhitā would seem to preserve this tradition by naming its five sections (Śiva-rātre, Indra-rātre, etc.) after these same five recipients.

Another variant is found in the *Vihagendrasaṃhitā* (I:34b-37a):[8]

ādau kṛtayuge prāpte keśavena prasāditāḥ|| [34b]
ananto garuḍaścaiva viṣvaksenaḥ kapālabhṛt| [35a]
brahmā ityeva pañcaite śṛṇvanti pṛthagīritam || [35b]
anantam [*sic*] prathame rātrau garuḍaśca dvitīyake| [36a]
tṛtīyarātre seneśaś caturthe vedhasā śrutam|| [36b]
rudraḥ pañcamarātre ca śraddhāśāstram pṛthak pṛthak | [37a]

Further, the important *Iśvarasaṃhitā* (XXI: 519, 532-533a][9] has this:

pañcāyudhāmśās te pañca śāṇḍilyaś caupagāyanaḥ| [519a]
mauñjyāyanaḥ kauśikaśca bharadvājaśca yoginaḥ|| [519b]
* * * * *
pañcāpi pṛthag ekaikaṃ divārātraṃ jagatprabhuḥ| [532a]
adhyāpayāmāsa yataḥ tatas tanmunipuṅgavāḥ|| [532b]
śāstram sarvajanair loke pañcarātram itīryate| [533a]

It is perhaps amusing, if not of direct relevance to our task here, to note that the notion of *pañcarātra* having something to do with "five nights" was, while widespread, yet misunderstood, so that a 16th or 17th century Śākta cult work, the *Śaktisaṃgama Tantra* (VIII:3),[10] says simply that those who are called Pāñcarātrins are those who take the vow for five days not to look on the face of a Śaivite:

pañcarātrivrataṃ prāptāḥ pāñcarātrāḥ prakīrtitāḥ| [3a]
dinapañcakaparyantaṃ śaivānām na vilokanam|| [3b]

I-B. Several saṃhitā passages may be found where °-*rātra* is still understood as "night"—but in the sense that when other systems of thought and practice are compared to the resplendent pañcarātra system, they are as nights are to day. For example, the authoritative *Pādmasaṃhitā* ("jñānapāda" I : 74)[11] uses that image:

pañcatvamatha vā yadvad dīpyamāne divākare | [74a]
ṛcchanti rātrayas tadvat itarāṇi tadantike || [74b]

And, in almost the same words, the *Aniruddhasaṃhitā* (I: 37b-38b)[12] presents this:

8. *Vihagendrasaṃhitā*, Adyar ms. 8. E. 28 (Devanagari script on paper).

9. *Iśvarasaṃhitā*, Conjeevaram, Sudarsana Press, 1923 (Devanagari script); also Mysore, Sadvidya Press, 1890 (Telugu script).

10. *Śaktisaṃgama Tantra*, Baroda, Gaekwad's Oriental Series, Vol. 61, 1932 (Devanagari script), "Kālikhaṇḍa," "VIII : 3 (p. 93).

11. *Pādmasaṃhitā*, Mysore, Sadvidya Press, 1891 (Telugu script); also *Pādma Tantra*, Bangalore, V. Naidu and Company, 1927 (2 vols.) (Telugu script). "Authoritative" because its use today in the training of arcakas is fairly widespread, and it is turned to by contemporary Pañcarātrins as an oft-cited authority.

12. *Aniruddhasaṃhitā*, edited and published by A. Srinivasa Iyengar, Mysore, 1956 (Devanagari script).

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pañcatvamatha vā yadvad dīpyamāne divākare ‖ [37b]
ṛcchanti rātrayas tadvad itarāṇi tadantike | [38a]
tasmāt pañcarātrākhyam brahmā lokapitāmahaḥ ‖ [39b]

So also, but in somewhat different words, the *Viśvāmitrasaṃhitā* (II: 7):[13]

atha vā rātrayo yadvat sannidhau pañcatāya vai | [7a]
nīyante tadvad anyāni śāstrāṇyetsaya sannidhau | [7b]

Along the same lines, but now alluding to five other systems that fade away in the light of the Pañcarātra teachings, we have an earlier śloka from the above-quoted *Pādmasaṃhitā* ("jñānapāda" I:73):

candratārāgaṇam yadvat śobhate naiva vāsare | [73a]
tathetarāṇi śobhante pañca naivāsya sannidhau ‖ [73b]

And the same words exactly are found, again in some earlier ślokas of a work already cited above, in the *Aniruddhasaṃhitā* (I: 36b-37a).

I-C. The element °-*rātra* is used in a curiously interesting way in at least four passages, in which are more or less specified which of the other "other five systems" are thrown into darkness [*rātrīyante*/*rātryāyante*] by the Pañcarātra. In the twice-mentioned *Pādmasaṃhitā*, in yet another place, we have simply these words:

pañcetarāṇi śāstrāṇi rātrīyante mahāntyapi | [72a]
tat sannidhau samākhyāsau tena loke pravartate‖ [72b]

The reference to "other systems" is somewhat more specific, as in the *Aniruddhasaṃhitā* (I: 35b-36a), where we read about Sāṁkhya, Yoga and "other" systems:

sāṁkhyayogādiśāstrāṇi rātrīyante mahāntyapi ‖ [35b]
tat-sannidhau samākhyāsau tena loke pravartate | [36a]

And, in the *Viśvāmitrasaṃhitā* (II: 6), again, similarly:

sāṁkhyayogādayaḥ pañca rātryāyante 'sya sannidhau | [6a]
tasmād vā pañcarātrārthaḥ procyate sūrisattamaiḥ ‖ [6b]

The *Puṣkarasaṃhitā* (XXXVIII: 307b-308b),[14] said to be one of the three most ancient of the canonical saṃhitā texts, avers that the Purāṇas, Vedas, Vedāntas (Upaniṣads), Sāṁkhya and Yoga—five in number, and specified—are thrown into darkness by the Pañcarātra system:

purāṇam vedavedāntam tathānyat sāṁkhyayogajam ‖ [307b]
pañcaprakāram vijñeyaṃ yatra rātryāyate 'bjaja | [308a]
phalotkarṣavaśenaiva pañcarātramiti smṛtam ‖ [308b]

In one passage, °-*rātra* is coupled with what is illusory [*tāmasa*], and the "Pañcarātra" is said to be *other than the five tāmasa schools*—namely, the Buddhists, the Pāśupata, the Kāpālika, the Śaivite, and the Gāṇapatya. The passage is found in the *Vāmanasaṃhitā* (XXXIII: 57-58):[15]

13. *Viśvāmitrasaṃhitā*, Adyar ms. 10. K. 4 (Devanagari script on paper).
14. *Puṣkarasaṃhitā*, edited by H.H. Sri Yatiraja Sampathkumara, Bangalore, A. Srinivasa Iyengar and M.C. Thirumalachariar (publishers), 1934 (Devanagari script).
15. Quoted in *Utsavasaṃgraha*, a manuscript at the Adyar Library and Research Centre quoting extensively from eleven Pancarātra saṃhitā texts,

bauddham pāśupataṃ caiva kāpālam śaivameva ca ! [57a]
gāṇapatyam ca pañcaite tāmasāni samīritāḥ ‖ [57b]
tamastu rātrir ityuktam tadviśiṣṭena tāmasam | [58a]
tasmāt pañcetaratvācca śāstram pañcetaram viduḥ ‖ [58b]

With the above passage we begin to encounter those passages where °-*rātra* is construed in the saṃhitā literature not merely as "obscuration," but more definitely as "obliteration," even "ignorance," "bondage," and the like. As an example of a passage that makes explicit the identification of *rātri* with "ignorance" [*ajñāna*], we cite a passage from the *Śrīpraśnasaṃhitā* (II:40).[16] In addition to noting the change from °-*rātra* to °-*rātri*, note also the peculiar rendition given to *pañca*-° which here no longer means "five" but is, rather, equated with "the destroyer"—perhaps an analysis stemming from *pañcatvam* ("death"):

rātrir ajñānam ity uktam pañcety ajñānanāśakam | [40a]
tac chāstram pāñcarātram syād anvarthasyānurodhataḥ ‖ [40b]

Most of the other passages in which °-*rātra* (or *rātri*) is used negatively simply take *pañca*-° to refer to "five" of something—usually the number of things that bind, enslave, delude or otherwise impede man. For example, the *Paramasaṃhitā* (I: 40b-41a) says that the five *bhūtas*, their subtle forms, *garva*-ego, *buddhi*- intelligence, and ideal forms [*avyakta*]—these are the "night" (read "bonds") for the human person. Pañcarātra releases him from their hold

bhūtamātrāṇi garvaśca buddhir avyaktam eva ca ‖ [40b]
rātrayaḥ puruṣasyoktāḥ pañcarātram tataḥ smṛtam | [41a]

This may be compared with a passage from the *Viṣṇu Tantra* (I: 76b-78a),[17] in which the "five" is still given a psychological reference—though different from the above—and in which the understanding of °-*rātri* is still "darkness" as in ignorance, hence an impediment:

avyaktaṃ ca manobuddhir ahaṁkāraśca cittakam ‖ [76b]
tanmātrāś caiva gandhādyā rātrayo dehinas smṛtāḥ | [77a]
ebhis samanvitair dehair dehinām bhuktimuktidam ‖ [77b]
sādhanam pūjanam tvetat pañcarātram iti smṛtam | [78a]

Or, noting that the psychological reference now extends outward into the world so as to include the objects of the senses, these being the "five" impediments which lead into "darkness"; we read this in the *Viṣṇusaṃhitā* (II: 49b-51a):[18]

rātrayo gocarāḥ pañca śabdādiviṣayātmikāḥ ‖ [49b]
mahābhūtātmakā vātra pañcarātram idam tataḥ | [50a]
avāpya tu paraṃ tejo yatraitāḥ pañca rātrayaḥ ‖ [50b]
naśyanti pañcarātraṃ tat sarvājñānavināśanam | [51a]

16. *Śrīpraśnasaṃhitā*, Kumbakkonam, Mangalavilasa Press, 1904 (Grantha script).
17. *Viṣṇu Tantra*, Adyar ms. 8.1.18 (Devanagari script on paper); not to be confused with another work, *Viṣṇusaṃhitā*, cited in note 18, below.
18. *Viṣṇusaṃhitā*, Trivandrum, Trivandrum Sanskrit Series, N. 85, 1925 (Devanagari script).

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In a work already noticed, that is in the *Paramasaṃhitā* (I: 39b-40a), occurs a passage having a slight variation on the foregoing examples, and one that can best be understood, now, in their context :

mahābhūtaguṇāḥ pañca rātrayo dehinaḥ smṛtāḥ ‖ [39b]
tadyogādvinivṛttervā pañcarātram iti smṛtam | [40a]

At this point, also, the continuation of another passage already cited above can demonstrate further how the reference to "five" objects as *rātrayaḥ*- impediments moves out even further from the psychological realm into the natural realm of the elements—for we read in the *Viṣṇu Tantra* again (I:78b-80a) :

yato bhūtaguṇāḥ pañca rātrayo dehinas smṛtāḥ ‖ [78b]
tadbhogādvinivṛttis tu kārayeyur yatas tataḥ ‖ [79a]
āvāhanāsanādyaiśca tantroktaiśca yajeta māṃ ‖ [79b]
[?] tam kārayanti [?pālayanti] janmādyair yattat tantramitīritam | [80a]

Or, even more clearly, from the same text a few lines earlier (I: 74b-76a), we observe that the reference to the "five" is to ether, air, fire, water and earth—all deluding agents [*rātrayaḥ*] of men :

viyad vāyuśca vahniśca āpaścaiva dharā tathā ‖ [74b]
rātrayo dehināṃ proktā avidyāsambhavas tataḥ | [75a]
tadbhogād vinivṛttim tu kārayeyur yatas tataḥ ‖ [75b]
pañcarātram iti proktam etac chāstram mayā tathā | [76a]

These "five" deluding elements are named in a passage from the *Hayaśīrṣasaṃhitā* ("Ādi" IV : 2-3)[19] and are, in fact, identified directly as *rātrayaḥ*. It is worth placing this passage alongside the above for comparison :

ākāśavāyutejāṃsi pānīyam vasudhā tathā | [2a]
etā vai rātrayaḥ khyātā hy acaitanyāst amotkaṭāḥ ‖ [2b]
rātrīṇāmapyathaitāsāṃ vyatiriktaṃ nirañjanam | [3a]
sa yadā buddhyate tattvaṃ tadā mukto'nukīrtyate ‖ [3b]

As a final example in this group, where °-*rātra* is construed negatively, we cite a passage from the *Kapiñjalasaṃhitā* (I: 31b-32).[20] Here, "five" refers not only to the five elements but also to the five senses which apprehend them, the *guṇas*, and *rātrayaḥ* refers to creatures who are bound and restricted by those five elements and senses. Pañcarātra, then, is that system which dis-associates those creatures from their mundane enjoyment :

pṛthivyādīni bhūtāni guṇāḥ pañca mahāmate ‖ [31b]
rātrayo jantavaḥ proktāḥ sarvaśāstreṣu niścitāḥ | [32a]
tadbhogād vinivṛttis tu pāñcarātam iti smṛtam ‖ [32b]

I-D. Moving now from the negative notions associated with the element °-*rātra* in the saṃhitā definitions of *pañcarātra*, we can find another group of

19. *Hayaśīrṣasaṃhitā* ("Ādikāṇḍa"), Rajshahi (East Pakistan), The Varendra Research Society (2 vols.), 1952/1957 (Devanagari script).

20. *Kapiñjalasaṃhitā*, Cuddapah, K.C.V. Press, 1896 (Telugu script).

passages in which, as in the "jñānakāṇḍa" of the *Brahmapurāṇa*,° *-rātra* is construed as "knowledge"—or, elsewhere, as "enlightenment"—hence, also in the sense of a "gift" or as "grace". In one passage, *rātra* is understood as "knowledge," and this is made quite explicit. This is in a passage referred to by Professor van Buitenen (*loc. cit.*) as the *Nāradīya Saṃhitā*, but which in order not to confuse it with another authentic Pāñcarātrāgama work of that same name (*see* below, and note 22), should rather be called by its proper name, the *Jñānāmṛtasārasaṃhitā*. Although Schrader (*op. cit.*, p. 24) states that this work certainly cannot be used as a Pañcarātra authority, it nonetheless represents an attempt in a late Pāñcarātra work to define the vexing term—and we are even told explicitly what the five-fold "knowledge" consists of (I: i: 40-55) in the ślokas succeeding the one we here cite (I : i: 44)[21]:

rātraṃ ca jñānavacanaṃ jñānaṃ pañcavidhaṃ smṛtam | [44a]
tenedaṃ pañcarātraṃ ca pravadanti manīṣiṇaḥ ‖ [44b]

In another passage, this time from the work properly to be called the *Nāradīyasaṃhitā* (I: 77),[22] it is only implicit that *pañca-*° and/or °-*rātra* may be construed as "knowledge." There the Pañcarātra system is equated with the highest knowledge [*param jñānam*/*mahājñānam*] given by Viṣṇu. In the passage, Nārada has been explaining to Gautama the process of Creation through the Lord's power of *māyā*. Gautama has asked what it is that one does to overcome or to transcend this *māyā*. To this, Nārada replies that it is only by observing the ways of the Pañcarātra system of worship that one can achieve this effect over *māyā*. It is at this point that the crucial lines come in which we may assume that the definition implied would be that °-*rātra* is to be equated with *jñānam*, while *pañca-*° is to be equated with *mahā-* and *param* :

tasmāt paramiha jñānam bhāṣitam viṣṇunā hitam | [77a]
pañcarātram iti khyātam bhuktimuktiphalapradam ‖ [77b]

Professor V. Raghavan (*op.cit.*, p. 74) places himself with those who oppose —presumably on philological grounds—taking the word *rātra* to mean "knowledge." From that perspective, one may indeed echo his words, ".....How this [connection] is possible is not known." But from the phenomenological point of view of an historian of religion, simply the fact that the Pañcarātrins have given *rātra* this sectarian sense is reason enough to accept the identification. Perhaps one passage from the *Śāṇḍilyasaṃhitā* (I: iv: 70-76)[23] may give some insight into the rationale for using *rātra* in a positive sense. In this passage while *rātra* still has the initial sense as "night", nonetheless one notes that the use has the feeling of something pleasurable and refreshing—very much as

21. *Jñānāmṛtasārasaṃhitā*, edited by K. M. Bannerjea, Calcutta, Asiatic Society of Bengal, Bibliotheca Indica Vol. 38 (Devanagari script) ; English translation of this work found in *Sacred Books of the Hindus*, Vol. 23. The work is variously called *Nārada Saṃhitā*, *Nāradīya Saṃhitā* and *Nāradapāñcarātra*.

22. *Nāradīyasaṃhitā*, Adyar ms. 10 K. 4 (Devanagari script on paper.)

23. *Śāṇḍilyasaṃhitā* ("Bhaktikhaṇḍa"), edited by Mahamahopadhyaya Gopinath Kaviraj, Godhowlia (Benaras), printed by H.P. Dutt, Eureka Printing Works, Princess of Wales Saraswati Bhavan Texts No. 60, pts. I and II, 1935/1936 (Devanagari script).

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cool nights are welcome interludes following upon hot, Indian days. In this comparison, Sāṁkhya, Yoga, Śaiva, Veda and Āraṇyaka are together termed *rātrayaḥ* ("nights") because they give us the pleasure and bliss of self-realization [*ātmānanda*]; and the same sum can be given by the Pañcarātra—hence its name.

sāṁkhyam yogas tathā śaivam vedāraṇye ca pañcakam | [75a]
procyante rātrayaḥ kānte ātmānandasamarpaṇāt || [75b]
pañcānāmīpsito yo 'rthaḥ sa yatra svayamāpyate | [76a]
paramānandametena prāpnoti paramātmanaḥ || [76b]

I-E. For the Pāñcarātrins to attach special, esoteric meanings to common words is only to do what other sectarian groups before and since have also done. The case in point here is *rātra*, and it is worth noting at this point in our survey of saṃhitā-definitions that at least two attempts were made to treat °-*rātra* not as one word, but rather the result of two other components coming together. In both cases, the final element [*tra*|*trī*] is construed as from the verb meaning "to protect". In the first such example to be cited, the already-quoted *Śāṇḍilya-saṃhitā* (I: iv: 78), we have Pāñcarātra defined as that which gives *sāṁkhya* (="knowledge"?), *yoga* (= "discipline"?), *vairāgya* (="equanimity"?), *tapas* (= "self-control"?) and *bhakti* (= "devotion"?) to the Lord and, as well, that which protects [*trai*]:

sāṁkhyaṃ yogaśca vairāgyam tapo bhaktiśca keśave | [78a]
pañcārthadānataḥ trāṇāt vidyā sā pāñcarātrikī || [78b]

The other example is useful to illustrate the kind of etymological approach that has been (and still is) undertaken by Pañcarātrins who are not satisfied with the commonly accepted analyses. In this passage from the *Viś-āmitrasaṃhitā* (II: 3b-5b), a manuscript already cited, note that *pañca-*° is construed as "five"—referring to the five *indriyas* and their objects to the five gross elements and their subtle forms—much as in several of the passages we have already noted above. The passage continues by pointing out, however, that the "*rā*" which follows is a root, meaning "collection." Hence *pañcarā* means a collection of all the things just named, such a collection being nothing other than a human being. Finally, we are told, the element "*tra*" means "to protect"; and that which "protects" human beings [*pañcarāḥ*] is *Pañcarātra*:

pañcendriyāṇi viṣayāḥ pañcabhūtāni tadguṇāḥ || [3b]
pañcaśabdābhidheyāni vidvāṁso 'pyācacakṣire | [4a]
rā ityayamapi prokto dhāturādāyavācakaḥ || [4b]
viṣayendriyabhūtānāmādhātāraśca pañcarāḥ | [5a]
manuṣyāḥ pālanātteṣāṃ pañcarātram iti smṛtam || [5b]

II. *Variant Definitions based on the Element pañca-*°

Turning specifically to the element *pañca-*° in the word *pañcarātra*, one notes that it almost always refers to five items—although the items, indeed, do vary.

II-A. To be sure, there are instances where the "five" is construed to be the four Vedas plus the Pañcarātra system as a "fifth." Here, presumably, °-*rātra* would again imply "knowledge." An example of this type of definition is seen in the *Aniruddhasaṃhitā* (II: 12b):

pañcamam vedamākhyātam pañcarātram tu pāvanam || [12b]

So also in the *Vāmanasaṃhitā*.[24] Further, one may also refer to the *Śeṣa-saṃhitā* (I: 4):[25]

pañcamo veda ityuktaḥ pañcarātraṃ tu nārada | [4a]
tanmārgeṇaiva sarvam syāt labhen mokṣam hitam harim || [4b]

II-B Closer to a normative type, however, are those definitions in which "five" items—sometimes specified, sometimes not—constitute the main thrust of whatever meaning is attached to the name Pañcarātra. As already noted in section I-B, above, the "five" may refer to the *five* senses, the *five* objects of the senses, the *five* gross elements, the *five* "other systems" thrown into darkness when compared to the brilliance of the resplendent Pañcarātra, and the like. To those, now add the following simple passage, quoted in the *Utsavasaṃ-graha* but for which no source is given,[26] indicating that the Pañcarātra system is that which includes the sum of all that is to be known by the study of the Purāṇas, the Nyāya, Mīmāṁsā, Sāṁkhya and Yoga systems:

purāṇam nyāyamīmāṁsam tathānyat sāṁkhyayogataḥ |
pañcaprakāravijñeyaḥ pañcarātram iti smṛtam ||

Another interesting example, also quoted in the *Utsavasaṃgraha* with no indication of its canonical source [27], refers also to "five" systems, or "śāstras." But in this case the "five" are significantly different although it is affirmed that the Pañcarātra is a combination of them all. While the statement is not altogether accurate, it is still taking into consideration the overall contents of the available extant Pāñcarātrāgama texts—not entirely misleading.[28] The "five" which are said to be combined are *āgama*, *bharata* (dancing treatises), *śilpa* (iconographical and architectural rules), *vaidya* (medicine) and *jyotiṣa* (astrology):

āgamam bharatam śilpam vaidyam jyotiṣam eva ca |
pañcaśāstrāṇi samyogāt pañcarātram iti smṛtam ||

II-C. In a number of cases, numerous enough to constitute a type to be noticed separately, the element *pañca-*° in the name Pañcarātra is understood to refer not simply to one "five" but instead to various combinations of pentads. For example, one passage, too long to be usefully quoted here, from the readily-available *Ahirbudhnyasaṃhitā* (XI : 35b-65a),[29] alludes to

24. Quoted in the Adyar ms. *Utsavasaṃgraha*, pp. 1257 ff.
25. *Śeṣasaṃhitā*, edited by Laksmipuram Srinivasacharya, Mysore, Mysore Government Press, 1935 (Devanagari script).
26. See the Adyar *ms. Utsavasaṃgraha*, Vol. III, p. 15.
27. *loc. cit.*
28. See Schrader, *Introduction to the Pañcarātra*....p. 26. For a study of the *śilpa* passages in the Pañcarātra saṃhitās related to temple-building, see the present writer's *Pañcarātraprāsādaprasādhanam*, Madras, Ratnam Press, 1963 (Devanagari script).
29. *Ahirbudhnyasaṃhitā*, edited by F.O. Schrader, Adyar, Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1916 (2 vols). (Devanagari scripts).

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two "fives." The passage referred to speaks of an "Original Version" of God's śāstra that was one million (or, an infinite number of) chapters in extent. It came (to earth) to be taught as Vedas, Yoga, Sāṁkhya, Pāśupata and Pañcarātra—the fifth one, Pañcarātra, being the purest essence of the "Original Version." Further, the same passage continues, the Pañcarātra reveals God's nature as being five-fold—*para*, *vyūha*, *vibhava*, etc. So here we have the "five" referring both to the fivefold nature of God's Being and to the fifth śāstra which is the most accurate of all the teachings.

The *Vihagendrasaṃhitā*, already cited above, in addition to construing "five" to refer to the teaching that was handed down to five sages in the course of five nights (I: 34b-37a) goes on, somewhat ingeniously, to indicate that "five" further has significance inasmuch as the Jñāna, Yoga, Kriyā and Caryā sections of this literature altogether constitute five lakhs of granthas—hence the name Pañcarātra (I: 37b-38a):

jñānayogakriyācaryāgrantham śatasahasrakam ‖ [37b]
pañcalakṣapramāṇam syāt pañcarātram iti smṛtam | [38a]

Reflecting this fascination with "fives", in the already-cited *Viṣṇusaṃhitā* the origin of the world is discussed (IV: 23-35 *passim*) and there is apparently an effort made to show how significant the number five is in the subtle and gross manifestations of matter—*vaikārika-ahaṃkāra* augments into five *indriyas*; *taijasa-ahaṃkāra* augments into five *karmendriyas*; *tāmasa-ahaṃkāra* augments into five *bhūtas*; the five *tanmātras*; and the Lord Himself creates, ordains and destroys with His five *śaktis*.

Of all the passages that turn upon the concept of "five", one from this same *Viṣṇusaṃhitā* (II: 12b ff.) is the most ingenious and imaginative—and is perhaps, in certain ways, the most instructive. The passage is too long to quote here, but it can be summarized as dealing with five groups of "fives." First (II: 12b ff.), the "tantras" accept as valid five means of knowledge [*pramāṇam*]—perception [*pratyakṣa*], inference [*anumāna*], analogy [*upamāna*], verbal knowledge [*śabda*] and presumption [*arthāpatti*]. Second (II: 20off.), there are five kinds of "tantras"—those belonging to the Śaivas, Vaiṣṇavas, Brāhmas, Sauras and Kaumāras. Third (II: 27), five groups [*gocāras*] are mentioned, devoted to gods like Vāsudava, Brahmā, *etc.* Fourth (II: 26b-35a) there are five Pañcarātra groups to be recognized—Vaikhānasas, Sāttvatas, Śikhins, Ekāntins and Mūlakas; these are, further, interrelated with one another so that there are some twenty-five groups in all (5 x 5). And fifth (II: 40 ff.), there are five groups of *dīkṣitas* mentioned—samayins, putrakas, sādhakas, deśikas and gurus. Some of these groups of five would surely be worth further study to understand the Pañcarātra school descriptively.

II-D. A number of definitions turning upon the element *pañca-*° may be grouped together conveniently, for they all refer to the fact that a Pañcarātrin is one who observes five particular practices. These definitions all point to the feeling held among many Pāñcarātrins today, namely that the faith is not so much what one is or what one thinks but what one does and what he observes.

The first example to be cited in this regard is a passage from the *Śāṇḍilyasaṃhitā* (I: iv: 77), a work cited before. In this passage two sets of "five" are referred to—the five *pramāṇas* and the five *arthas*, the latter having reference to the five *kālas*, namely, *abhigamana*, etc.—in such a way that presupposes knolwedge of what these are and how they are incorporated into the Pāñcarātra way of life :

pramāṇapañcakaiḥ pūrṇam pañcakārthopadeśanam | [77a]
prapañcātītasaddharmam pañcarātramudāhṛtam ‖ [77b]

Indeed, observance of the five-fold *kālas*— *abhigamana*, *upādāna*, *ijyā*, *svādhāyaya* and *yoga*[30]— seem in several other passages to be stressed as the epitome of the "meaning" of Pāñcarātra life. For example, we read in the *Śeṣasaṃhitā* (I:6) that those who worship the Lord Kṛṣṇa by the observance of the five *kālas* will satisfy *dharma*, enjoy *kāma*, etc., and finally reach the highest heavens:

pañcakālavidhānena viṣṇum arcayantīha ye | [6a]
dharmakāmādikam prāpya te yānti paramam padam ‖ [6b]

Compare this with a line from the *Jayākhyasaṃhitā* (XVI : 9a):[31]

pañcakālarataś caiva pañcarātrārthavit tathā [9a]

And, note also this line from the *Pārameśvarasaṃhitā* (X: 129a):[32]

tvam pañcakālakartṛṇām gatistvam pāñcarātrika |

And, also, the śloka from the *Vāmanasaṃhitā* (XXXIII: 5), quoted in the *Utsavasaṅgraha* :

yasmāt phalaṃca [*sic*] divārātram pañcānāmuditam mayā | [5a]
tasmāt loke pañcarātram abhidhānam iti smṛtam ‖ [5b]

Even the highly regarded, but extra-canonical, *Śrīpañcarātrarakṣā* by Vedānta Deśika has it—in the penultimate śloka of the first chapter[33]— that the Pañcarātra system is best understood as that which lays stress upon the *pañcakāla*-observances and their importance :

pañcakālavyavasthityai veṅkaṭeśavipaścitā |
śrīpañcarātra-siddhāntavyavastheyaṃ samarthitā ‖

Two other examples may be cited in which it is suggested that in addition to—if not in place of— the observance of the *pañcakālas* a worthy Pañcarātrin fulfiils certain other expectations. In a commentary usually attached to the *Bharadvājasaṃhitā* II[34], we gain insight into what the ideal Pāñcarātra

30. For a definition of the five *kālas*, see the *Jayākhyasaṃhitā*, edited by Embar Krishnamacharya, Baroda, Gaekwad's Oriental Series, Vol. 54, 1931 (*Devanāgarī script*), XXII : 65b ff. (p. 253).

31. *Ibid.* (p. 155).

32. *Parameśvarasaṃhitā* (*Śrī Parameśvarasaṃhitā*), edited by Sri U. Ve. Govindacarya, Srirangam, Sri Vilasam Press, 1953 (*Devanāgarī script*).

33. *Śrī Pañcarātrarakṣā*, edited by Pandit M. Duraiswami Aiyangar and Pandit T. Venugopalacharya, Adyar, Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1942 (*Devanāgarī script*).

34. The exponential Roman numeral after the title is to distinguish this work, a late production of the Pañcarātra school dealing with the subject of *prapatti* and appearing in several editions, from another canonical work in the Pañcarātrāgama corpus of the same name. The present reference is to the 1905 edition of the work, printed in Bombay.

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prapanna was to be like. Observe again how groups of fives are useful in understanding how Pañcarātrins interepret the term *pañcarātra* and understand their faithfulfiess. In a passage (commentary on III: 96) which attempts to classify types of believers and non-believers, a negative approach is taken which, in reverse, indicates what the ideal is. In verse 96, four groups of descending order of respectability are named as having respectively only 4, 3, 2 or 1 of the five *saṃskāra*-sacraments—indicating by implication and context that the true *prapanna* is he who has *puṇḍra*, *nāma*, *mantra*, *tāpa* and *pūjā* in his continual possession.[35] Further (commentary on III : 98), groups are also named who likewise demonstrate decreasignly a desire to adhere to certain practices—indicating by implication and by context again that the ideal Pāñcarātra *prapanna* is one who does his own duty [*svakarma*], one who knows the śāstra, one who worships God, one who obeys his guru, and one who associates with good people [*satsaṅga*]. Thus we have the "meaning" of the term *pañcarātra*, and the system itself, inextricably bound up with certain observances and certain ethical modes of behaviour—a not uncommon way for contemporary Pañcarātrins to attempt definition of the meaning of their sect's curious name. Only one other passage seems to connect the *Pañcasaṃskāra*-observances in any essential way with the essence of what it is to be a Pañcarātrin —and that is the following passage from the already cited *Seṣasaṃhitā* (I: 37):

madvaṃśajānāṃ sādhūnāṃ pañcakālaratātmanām | [37a]
pañcasaṃskārayuktānāmidam sarvam vadet sadā ‖ [37b]

Note in this śloka that in addition to being limited to people who are born in "my family," the narrator restricts the Pañcarātra-teachings to those who are gentle, who have undergone the five *saṃskāra*-sacramental rites and not surprisingly—who observe the five-fold *kālas*.

III. Other, Miscellaneous Explanations:—

Two more explanations of the "meaning" of the word *pañcarātra* will suffice in closing. Both are based on the saṃhitā literature, though one of these but indirectly. Both have the virtue of presenting data that conform to certain observable activities and concerns acknowledged today by Pañcarātrins, and both find approval in the Pañcarātra communities as they seek to explain themselves and the nature of their central witness. Both, however, can be looked at here only in passing for both suggest further analysis than it is possible to do in the present paper.

35. The rites here called "Pañcasaṃskāra" are also, more often and popularly, known as *samāśrayaṇa*. Other synonyms, too, like *prapatti*, are used but these need not detain us. The rites are of the nature of *dīkṣā* (initiation-rites) leading into the full adoption of a Pañcarātra way of life. The rites usually include *puṇḍra*-cosmetics, *nāma*-designation, *mantra*-instructions, *tāpa*-brandings and *pūjā*-initiation with an Ācārya's help. The most complete description of these rites in English is in K. Rangachari's *The Śrī Vaiṣṇava Brahmins*, Madras, Bulletin of the Madras Government Museum New Series—General Section, Vol. II, Pt. 2, 1931, pp. 34-37. See also the *Iśvarasaṃhitā* (XXI : 284-448) for the most extensive treatment in the canonical literature on the subject, even though it represents the point of view of the Tengalai branch of Śrī Vaiṣṇavas only.

This first is an attempt to trace the "meaning" of *pañcarātra* to an original system of worship used among a group of five *gotras*, native to five particular places. This is of interest because within the Pañcarātra elite communities there are generally acknowledged to be but five family lineages that are acceptable. The tradition comes from the *Vāmanasaṃhitā* as quoted in the *Utsavasaṃgraha*.[36] In a rather lengthy passage there, Vāmana is speaking to Yājñavalkya, recalling what he had in turn heard from Aupagāyana. Aupagāyana was one of five ṛṣis who had gathered at his native place in Toṭādri to perform penance in order to learn the way of salvation. Aupagāyana was joined there by Śāṇḍilya, who came from a place referred to as Pāṇḍavakṣetra; by Bhāradvāja, who was born in a place referred to as Sālagrāmācala ; by Kauśika, or Viśvāmitra, reported to have been born in Mṛgasthala ; and by Mauñjāyana, said to have been from Anantapuri. As a result of their combined penances Brahmā appeared to them. He told them that only Nārāyaṇa Himself can dispense to them the saving knowledge they seek. As Brahmā disappeared from their view, Vāsudeva appeared in his place. And to the sages' questions He said, "those who worship Me according to the Pañcarātra Śāstra, which is the Fifth Veda and is also to be called 'Mahopaniṣad' becaue of its 'great mantra' addressed to Me, they get *bhukti* and *mukti*." At this point,[37] the sages ask the Lord about the lineage of those who are acceptable to worship Him. He traces the brahmins back to an origin in His face, and says that the various brahmins have different *gotras* and *caraṇas*. Among those *gotras*—He continues according to the long recollection of Aupagāyana and repeated by Vāmana —only five are eligible to worship Him according to the Pañcarātra. And those who are born at five particular places [*svayamvyaktas*—namely, Toṭādri, Pauṇḍravardha (*n.b.*), Sālagrāmācala, Mṛgasthala and Anantapuri] are best among those who worship Him and belong to His family. These have *dīkṣā* naturally, right from their birth. The Lord concludes: 'O you five, I have given you the mantra that is in the Pañcarātra and thus you are my family-members [*bhagavad-vaṃśa*]....and since you have the *saṃskāras* outlined by Me, and practise the *pañcakālas*, etc., the worship performed by you five alone gives the best fruits."

To pursue the complicated lines of examination suggested by this tradition would be to take us, surely, beyond the scope of this typological survey. Should the task ever be undertaken, however, another similar tradition should very likely be borne in mind, namely, what is found in the *Śrīpraśnasaṃhitā* (*adhy.* I and LIV). This tradition holds that only four *gotras* are acceptable. In this version, four ṛṣis from Vindhya approach Ekata on Mt. Meru, having been directed there to him by Kahola. The four are Vedaśira, Bhārgava Marīcīpa and Kavasa, representing respectively the Bhāradvāja, Vāsiṣṭha (?) Viśvāmitra and Kauṇḍinya *gotras*. The text claims that only those born in these families can best do *parārtha-pūjā*, and can be called Bhaṭṭars ; others are mere *dīkṣitas*.

36. Adyar ms. *Utsavasaṃgraha*, pp. 1257 ff.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 1265-1267.

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The other explanation of the "meaning" of pañcarātra was one that the present writer received from more than one Pañcarātrin while in India, and which accorded with his own survey of the contents of the available extant Pāñcarātrāgama texts. As an explanation it is basically a theological one. In it, °-*rātra* is construed—somewhat fancifully—to derive from a verb meaning "to give," and *pañca*-° is said to allude to the five modes of the Lords' Being, according to Pañcarātra-teachings. The theological motif founds itself on the notion of revelation, and how man can come to know God. As the explanation goes, the Lord is continually "giving" of Himself so that all may know Him according to their abilities—either in His *para*-mode, or in His *vyūha*, *vibhava* or *antaryāmin* manifestations. Especial emphasis is placed on the *fifth* mode of His Being, the *arcā*-form, that is, the icon or image by which even the most earth-bound human might encounter the Divine Presence. The Pañcarātra system, then is said to be that system which teaches about the five modes of God's Self-giving, with especial concern for His fifth, or *arcā*-image, mode of Self-revelation.

A survey of the broad contents of the Pāñcarātrāgama canonical texts corroborates —at least in part—this notion, and indicates that while some attention is given in the *saṃhitās* to philosophy and to personal discipline and social ethics, the bulk of the literature is devoted to giving directions for preparing an icon and constructing and otherwise making ready shrines to house that icon, along with specifications for how, when and by whom the *arcā*-presence of the Lord is to be worshipped.

IV. Summary

The problem of discovering "meaning" of the word *pañcarātra* is as vexing to a Western-trained Indologist as it is to a follower of the Pañcarātra sect of Vaiṣṇavas. The former, if he adheres to certain canons of scientific scholarship, must feel that the sectarian explanations are at least historically naive if not philologically untenable; yet, at the same time, he must also be struck by the fact that some of the explanations he is himself likely to advance may have little or nothing to do with the way the term is understood and used today by Pañcarātrins. On the other hand the latter, because he founds himself upon canonical writings and is intimately aware of cult practices and of the speculative dimensions within the sect, seems justifiably to complain that the outsiders' explanations are quite beside the point; yet, at the same time, he cannot help but be struck by the variety, even inconsistency, of his own sources. The present article has set forth in a typological framework a survey of the definitions of the word *pañcarātra* as these are explicitly given in the canonical Pāñcarātrāgama writings. It would appear from the variety of evidence presented here that the Pañcarātrins responsible for advancing and circulating the *saṃhitā* texts seem long since to have lost touch with the original, common understanding of the term—if there ever was one.

More evidence is needed if the "meaning" of the name *pañcarātra* is to yield to the inquiries of future scholars. Certainly the approach taken by Professor van Buitenen—seeking in extra-canonical sources notices regarding

the early followers of the school, their practices and reputation—deserves the attention of the most alert historians of religion; and the method illustrated by Professor V. Raghavan—applying the refined skills and precise tools of an enlightened textual critic—should also win emulation among aspiring Sanskritists. The corpus of Pañcarātra-literature, both canonical and secondary writings, remain even today relatively unexamined. It would appear that the search for the "meaning" of the term *pāñcarātra* must turn not only to the ancient and more recent writings of the school itself, but must also explore the broad phenomenology of the sect's practices and concerns descriptively and analytically, taking into account ritual and oral theology as well—all the while maintaining the sound scholarly approaches represented respectively by the two scholars mentioned above. This is no small undertaking. To those who would undertake to be a part of this probing enterprise, the data of this paper, culled from a number of *saṃhitā* texts, is offered.

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